Ray kin denies King murder plot

Washington — (UPI) — At a hearing disrupted by insults and recriminations, John Larry Ray denied yesterday that he helped his brother, James Earl Ray, escape from prison and rob banks in a conspiracy to set up the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

John Ray's testimony before the House Assassinations Committee was almost lost in bitter clashes involving his lawyer, James Lasar, and committee chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), who finally brought matters to a climax by telling Lasar: "You are a disgrace!"

Lasar angrily challenged Stokes to leave Capitol Hill and repeat that remark in a setting where he is not protected by congressional immunity from libel suit.

The clash ended when Stokes yielded the chair to another panel member for the remainder of John Ray's questioning and, at Lasar's insistence, formally withdrew his remark from the hearing record.

Stokes had threatened to expel Lasar because of his repeated objections to questioning about whether John Ray had helped James Earl Ray escape from prison in 1967 and rob banks to finance an assassination plot.

"I don't intend to flinch one inch in the face of that threat," Lasar told Stokes in one of their many exchanges.

"And I," said Stokes, "don't intend to flinch one inch in following the rules of the House."

Between times, John Ray stood his ground in denying the suggestion that he may have at least indirectly supported brother James's preparations for the April 4, 1968, murder in Memphis. He took the same tough stance a third Ray brother, Jerry, took before the panel Thursday.

John Ray also denied he ever met or knewn two St. Louis businessmen, both now deceased, who allegedly offered a $50,000 bounty in 1967 to anyone who would kill King.

Word of that bounty supposedly circulated in a St. Louis tavern then run by John Ray, but he said he never heard of such an offer nor any bar talk about plots to murder the civil rights leader.

Panel investigators say they suspect John and Jerry may have conspired with James Earl in setting up the King killing.

The husky, balding John, 45, who like James is a convicted bank robber, was cleared to attend the hearing by a judge in St. Louis, where he was arrested Monday on trespassing and assault charges. His attorney said John "wandered into a house by mistake."

He was escorted into the hearing room by a half dozen U.S. marshals.

In the course of questioning, he maintained he did not even know about James Earl's successful 1967 Missouri jail break at the time it occurred and denied he joined one or both of his brothers in bank robberies that took place in Illinois, Missouri and Florida from 1967 to 1969.

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John Larry Ray, brother of convicted assassin James Earl Ray, denied any part in an alleged conspiracy to kill Martin Luther King during the House Assassinations Committee hearings.

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